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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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of Discrimination and
Protection of Minorities
Forty-seventh session
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS WITH WHICH
THE SUBCOMMISSION HAS BEEN CONCERNED

Written statement submitted by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[18 July 1995]

Development and human rights - A case in point

1. In a search for sustained development it has sometimes been held that "the end justifies the means". While in a mature State - if such exists - any means employed should be consistent with the ends sought, under conditions of rapid and sustained development the situation may be more complex.

2. Over the last five years this would be especially true. Since 1990 our global scene has been transformed into a nihilistic arena of competitive self-interest, with developmental and human rights dimensions being largely negated - all but swamped in a rule-free extravaganza of financial deregulation and overall economic slump.

3. Any tension between rights and development may be more marked in large countries than in small ones, and the purpose here is to illustrate this problem by reference to a specific case - one arising in a State that successfully pursues intensively sustained development on behalf of more than 20 per cent of the world's people while faced with the threat of recurrent natural disasters.

4. The case in question is that of Dr. Xiao Xuehui, a moral philosopher and political essayist of 45 who, in the mid-1980s was appointed Associate Professor of Moral Philosophy at South Western Minorities University at Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan Province in south-west China. Influential in establishing "The Philosophy of Life" as a specific field of study, Dr. Xiao Xuehui soon became prominent in this field, advocating a humanistic theory that individuals must be responsible for their own actions and moral behaviour.

5. Xiao Xuehui has published two books on ethics and humanism: *The Human Agent Theory of the Philosophy of Life* (1988), and *The Awakening and the Degradation of the Human Agent* (1988). The two articles which established Xiao's national reputation are: "*Human agency in the original motive force of all moral actions*" (1986) and "*The essential nature of morality lies in restraint*" (1987). Other recent articles include: "*A comparative study of Chinese and Western ethical culture*" (1994) and "*Fundamental characteristics and values of the new ethical culture*" (1994).

6. Early in 1989, Dr. Xiao spoke at demonstrations and led marches in Sichuan in favour of the pro-democracy movement. In the same year she was arrested, rejecting an offer of lenient treatment in return for informing on her associates. After 19 months in prison, during which time she received harsh physical treatment which has seriously worsened health problems with kidney and liver, Dr. Xiao was sentenced to "deprivation of political rights" and released, but also deprived of her Associate Professorship and, later, a teaching job. Being forced to survive on Y170 per month, paying for medical treatment is extremely difficult, while it also prevents any participation in the many conferences to which she is invited.

7. But this is not yet the full story. Effectively, Dr. Xiao has become a non-person. Early in 1995 her weekly column on moral philosophy and related questions in the *Chinese Youth Newspaper*, a major national journal, was banned by the Sichuan authorities, and on editorial appeal confirmed from Beijing. She is kept under close surveillance, her correspondence is intercepted, she has no telephone and any contacts are often interrogated. When invited to give a talk at a Beijing conference she was conspicuously followed and prevented from speaking. Officially approved academics have been allowed to plagiarize early works by Dr. Xiao, so far without redress, since appeals to relevant authorities, including the State Copyright Bureau, have been ignored.

8. Some 2,600 years ago the first hint of what we now call human rights was being proclaimed in China: "Do to every other person that which, if you were that person, you would that they do to you". The International Humanist and Ethical Union calls on the appropriate authorities to restore Dr. Xiao's former academic status, to see to it that her basic rights, academic freedom and copyright are once again respected and that her harassment is ended, thereby preserving the good name of the academic and legal systems in the People's Republic of China

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